AND IMPROVE THE ATMOSPHERE WITHIN THE CLASSROOM AND COUNSELING WITH PARENTS, WITH SUCH COUNSELING BEING LIMITED TO CHILDREN'S SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT PROBLEMS. ANOTHER FUNCTION IS TO ESTABLISH AN EMPATHETIC RELATIONSHIP WITH CHILDREN. SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LATTER FUNCTION INCLUDE COMMUNICATING ON A SIMPLE VERBAL LEVEL, AND HELPING CHILDREN TO RELATE TO ADULTS OTHER THAN THEIR PARENTS. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR TRAINING PROGRAMS SHOULD INCLUDE, IN ADDITION TO A CORE CURRICULUM, GROUP GUIDANCE METHODS FOR BOTH CHILDREN AND PARENTS, SPECIAL TRAINING IN SERVING AS A TEACHER CONSULTANT, AND THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE. THE MAJORITY OF MASTER'S DEGREE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS COME FROM THE RANKS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS. THIS IS ONE OF THE REPORTS FROM THE ZION CONFERENCE AND THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DEMONSTRATION CENTERS INCLUDED IN "ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE IN ILLINOIS." (FS)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE IN ILLINOIS

Reports from the Zion Conference and
The Elementary School Demonstration Centers

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Prepared By

Department of Guidance Services
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

Issued By

Ray Page
Superintendent of Public Instruction

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Merle M. Ohlsen *

Citing recent research, Doctor Ohlsen takes a look at the attitudes toward counseling as expressed by elementary school teachers and principals. In stating his personal point of view, he indicates the scope and implementation of a functional elementary school guidance program. The role of the counselor, as well as his professional preparation, is explored.

Today we are beginning to hear a lot about the elementary school counselor. Some teachers and principals are asking such questions as: (1) With whom will he work? (2) What will be his qualifications? (3) Will he contribute new services or merely take over some of the services now provided by teachers, principals, or specialists currently employed by the school district? (4) Wouldn't it be better to make the classes smaller or to relieve teachers of some of their nonteaching duties so they could give more individual attention to their pupils rather than to use the funds to employ counselors?

Ferris (1965) asks some of these questions also. He expresses the fear that having a counselor work directly with the pupils would damage the close relationship that usually develops between an elementary teacher and his pupils. Those who are enthusiastic about what they have seen elementary school counselors do for pupils, parents, and teachers take the opposite view; they believe that the counselor enhances the development of a close working relationship between a teacher and his pupils (Brison, 1964; Kaczkowski, 1965; Lambert, 1954; Laiter, 1965; Mahan, 1965; Meeks, 1962; Ohlsen, 1964; Wilson, 1956; and Zeller and Garber, 1964).

Principal's Perceptions

Though he recognizes the need for an elementary school counselor's services, Waetjen (1965) contends that most elementary school principals would oppose the idea of employing counselors. In part, he thinks that the resistance to specialists arises

* Doctor Merle M. Ohlsen is Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana.

out of specialists failure to adapt to the elementary school setting. He thinks that it may also stem from the belief that teachers can handle all the problems that arise within their classrooms. As he sees it: "The challenge to elementary school principals is two-fold: first, to examine their resistance to having counselors in the elementary schools; and second, to differentiate the organization and functioning of the elementary school so that the counselor may emerge (Waetjen, p. 62)." It is his hope that the research and demonstration centers selected by the Research Commission on Pupil Personnel Services will help solve these and other similar problems.

McDougall and Reitan (1963) deplored the idea that no one had systematically surveyed the opinions of elementary school administrators and used their opinions in developing elementary school guidance programs. From their survey of elementary school principals' opinions (from Idaho, Oregon and Washington) they found: that the majority of responding principals favor the viewpoint that elementary guidance be concerned with specialized services to individual pupils rather than general curriculum guidance for all pupils. Preference is also expressed by the majority for personnel engaged in full-time guidance rather than a combination of part-time teaching and guidance duties. Seventy-five percent of the responding principals favored special certification for elementary guidance personnel and a majority also favored additional salary beyond the teaching salary schedule.

"The reaction of the principals was solicited regarding problems in establishing elementary guidance programs. The most frequently mentioned problems were in the areas of program, finance, gaining school and community acceptance for the guidance program, and obtaining adequately trained elementary guidance personnel."

"Principals expressed their judgment concerning the major differences between elementary and secondary school guidance. Areas mentioned most often were the greater emphasis on the preventive aspects of guidance at the elementary level; the

lesser need for occupational and vocational guidance in the elementary school; the need for more parental involvement at the elementary level; and the need for understanding developmental problems peculiar to childhood and pre-adolescence (McDougall and Reitan, p. 353)." In other words, these elementary school principals have a pretty good idea of what should be expected of the elementary school counselor. At least their ideas agree with the authors cited earlier who react favorably to having such a person employed in the elementary schools. If these principals accurately reflect the attitudes of most principals, then the climate for introducing the elementary counselors is more favorable than Waetjen (1963) perceives it to be.

The Teacher's Contribution

Important as the principals' perception is, attention must also be given to what the effective teacher contributes to normal development of children. He recognizes the importance of teaching subject matter, but he also knows that having children memorize facts and practice basic skills are not sufficient. He tries to get children excited about learning by exhibiting interest in the intellectual activities that excite them, by raising challenging questions, by helping them learn to challenge others and evaluate others ideas as well as their own, and by helping them locate and use information in making decisions. Besides increasing their desire to learn, he tries to improve their ability to educate themselves. He also tries to understand his pupils; to help them understand and accept themselves, and what they have a right to expect from themselves; to help them understand, accept, and work with important others such as classmates, parents, and teachers; and to help them discover and develop special interests, abilities, and aptitudes. He is interested in them. He is aware that what children learn is a function of their needs, community and family background; previous educational experiences, and the atmosphere within the classroom as well as their learning potential. He recognizes that he must be concerned about both the conative and cognitive aspects of learning.

Expectations from the Counselor

Based upon the above definitions of the elementary school teacher's responsibility for guidance, the elementary school counselor should be expected to help the teachers to further normal social, emotional, and intellectual development of his pupils, to better understand his pupils, to discover and try to remove blocks to learning, to make effective use of such school specialists as the school psychologist, school social worker, remedial teacher, and speech therapist, and to refer certain pupils and parents to out-of-school personnel and agencies for treatment. In fulfilling these functions the counselor consults with teachers, counsels children, and counsels parents concerning their children's school adjustment problems. Since he is primarily concerned with normal children and the prevention of serious school adjustment problems, he does short-term counseling, tries to help teachers discover problems early, and tries to help them improve the learning atmosphere within the classroom.

A Working Relationship With Children

Like those who counsel adolescents and adults, the elementary school counselor tries to develop an accepting, trusting relationship with his clients. He uses his knowledge of the counseling process, of human behavior, and of each client and his environment to try to understand each client's problems as the client sees them, and in the elementary school, to try to help the child, his parents, and his teacher to understand the forces at work within the client and his environment. At the same time, the counselor recognizes that insight in and of itself is not sufficient, and for many clients it is not necessary; these children learn to change their behavior without understanding why they had problems.

One of the unique characteristics of this relationship is the counselor's ability to listen--to make a personal investment in each client, and at the same time to maintain

separateness. When a counselor is at his best he can feel deeply with a client without experiencing countertransference. Moreover, he is able to convey this commitment to his clients and his expectations from them. He also is able to convey to children what they may expect from him, including his willingness to talk to them whenever they have something bothering them and they want to talk to someone privately; they must realize that they can seek assistance without waiting for a referral from an adult. Contrary to what many authors have said, staff members in the Illinois demonstration centers have found that children will seek help on their own when such action is accepted by teachers and counselors. Apparently elementary school children trust counselors more quickly than either adolescents or adults, but counselors tend to have greater difficulty communicating with them than they do with older clients. Kaczkowski (1965) believes that children's limited vocabulary accounts for a large part of this difficulty. Often a child does not know the best word to express a feeling, or he knows only a single meaning for a word which has many meanings and the counselor assumes another meaning, or he uses a word incorrectly and the counselor assumes a correct meaning for the word. Nevertheless, these counselors have found that even primary school age children can better convey verbally what bothers them than many noted authors have indicated. True, the counselor must listen very carefully, be patient and try to help the client fumble for words, or even teach the client new words to express his feelings. On some occasions the counselor also must use play materials to communicate, but not as often with normal children as psychotherapists have indicated one must with disturbed children.

What do these normal children talk to counselors about? A wide variety of problems from "I can't learn to read," or "My teacher doesn't like me," to "My little brother messes up my homework," or "My new puppy was killed." When, for example, a child thinks that his teacher does not like him, it helps just to have another adult at school listen to him and try to understand him. All some very young children need is

more experience in relating to adults, and help in discovering that all adults who accept them do not have to relate to them as their mothers do. Usually a teacher is deeply touched when he learns how much the relationship means to a child. Sometimes, though rarely, the child needs to be assigned to another teacher.

Counseling Parents

In counseling parents the same basic relationship is required. The principles for counseling adults apply, but at the time school counselors will have to try to limit themselves to helping parents deal with their children's school adjustment problems. Other problems will have to be referred to other agencies. This writer believes that eventually such services will be provided by agencies jointly supported by the local school district and mental health agencies. Now much can be done to help parents prevent school adjustment problems through cooperative efforts of school and community mental health personnel to provide group counseling for parents and seminars on child rearing for parents. Often the latter can be provided through the local school district's adult education program.

Consulting Teachers

Functioning as a consultant for teachers is an important aspect of every counselor's work, but it takes on more than the usual significance at the elementary school level. Most elementary school teachers work within a self-contained classroom in which they are the primary source of influence outside of the home for an entire school year. Fortunately, the typical elementary school teacher cares about his pupils, and he tries to understand them. Hence, he is quick to recognize the need for help from a counselor who can appreciate what he is trying to do for his pupils and who also will try to empathize with him. To benefit fully from what this counselor has to offer him, the teacher must trust the counselor--must believe that he can talk freely without fear of being criticized or evaluated. However, he will appreciate the counselor's

help in criticizing and evaluating himself. Thus, the counselor must not be a line officer in the administrative staff. Though he uses his counseling skills to establish a relationship which is very similar to that which a counselor establishes with his clients, it is different. Rather than helping a teacher deal with his personal problems, the counselor tries to help him discover why the pupil for whom the teacher sought assistance feels and behaves as he does; to help the teacher discover how he feels toward the child; to help him discover and remove the blocks to learning, and often this requires visits to the teacher's classroom as well as private conferences with the teacher and case conferences with several teachers (Ohlsen, 1964, pp. 182-187); and where appropriate, to help the teacher make a referral to school specialist or to an out-of-school specialist.

The counselor also consults teachers when he needs assistance in understanding his clients. In fact, asking teachers to help him is often the best way for a counselor to develop a relationship which encourages teachers to seek his assistance, but it must not be done for that purpose. If it is done merely for the purpose of manipulating teachers into seeking his help, teachers will see it for what it is and resent it. Counselors do need teachers' help in understanding their clients, and they had better seek teachers' aid only when they genuinely feel the need for it. There is no substitute for sincerity.

Professional Background and Preparation

Of the questions noted at the beginning of this paper that teachers and principals often ask, only two remain to be answered: (1) Wouldn't it be better to make the classes smaller or to relieve teachers of some of their nonteaching duties so they could give more attention to their pupils rather than to use the funds to employ counselors? and (2) What will be the counselor's qualifications? Granted, reducing class size and providing other assistance to reduce time in nonteaching functions would enable most

teachers to work more effectively with their pupils. However, such changes would not alleviate the need for counselors. The duties defined in this paper for counselors require specialized professional preparation which most teachers do not have.

With reference to the qualifications of the elementary school counselor, McDougall and Reitan (1963) found that the elementary principals whom they polled also recognized the need for elementary school counselors to have special preparation not ordinarily required of teachers. If one looks at the responsibilities that principals would like most for them to assume (counseling children, consulting parents, helping teachers learn to use appraisal techniques to understand children and to identify children with special talents, and interpreting the guidance program in the community), one can readily understand why they prefer persons with elementary school teaching experience and want them to have special preparation in such courses as principles of guidance, individual testing, tests and measurements, and counseling theory.

Hill and Nitzschke (1961) reported that most master's degree level persons in elementary school guidance (and that is about the level of training of qualified persons at present) come chiefly from ranks of elementary school teaching. Even as late as 1961 they found that few graduate institutions had well-defined programs for elementary school counselors. Major emphasis in the preparation programs existed in the areas of psychological foundations, guidance principles, counseling theory, and analysis of the individual. Moderate emphasis was placed upon the practicum, organization and administration, and research. Minor emphasis was placed upon information service, group work, social foundations, and remedial work. Nitzschke's (1965) findings on required courses suggest that graduate programs are similar today. However, he did note an increased concern for preparation of elementary school guidance workers.

Conclusions

Finally, there is an important job to be done by the elementary school counselor. pecial professional preparation is needed to do what should be expected of him. t present more attention must be given to developing graduate programs to help lementary school counselors meet their professional responsibilities. More ttention should be given to mental hygiene, personality development, group guidance nethods for both children and parents, and the practicum, including specific assistance . e. learning to function as a consultant to teachers as well as a counselor for pupils nd parents.

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